

Israel-Egypt in talks on Gaza truce renewal

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Israeli and Egyptian officials were due to hold talks in Cairo on Sunday on efforts to renew a ceasefire with Hamas in the Gaza Strip which expires this week

Top Israeli defence ministry official Amos Gilad was in Cairo to meet Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman on the truce, which was hammered out in June through Egyptian mediation.

An Israeli defence official had told AFP on Saturday that the government was prepared to renew the truce with Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist group which seized power in Gaza last year after violently routing its Fatah rivals.

"If Hamas is ready to maintain the calm and return to the situation as it was three weeks ago, Israel will be willing to continue the truce," the official said on condition of anonymity.

The ceasefire agreement has been rattled since November 4 by a string of tit-for-tat attacks between the Israeli army and militants, who have fired dozens of rockets against southern Israel.

Talks about renewing the ceasefire come a week after Israel's interim Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had told security chiefs to make plans for military action against Gaza militants.

Israel said its border crossings into the impoverished coastal strip would remain closed on Sunday after Palestinian militants launched mortar rounds into southern Israel, causing no casualties or damage.

Last week, Israel allowed Israel allowed dozens of trucks filled with humanitarian supplies into the Gaza Strip, where most of the 1.5 million residents depend on outside aid.

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